

ASSESSING CHILD HUNGER IN NATIONAL CLIMATE POLICY

Child hunger[1] warrants particular attention within climate policy because inadequate nutrition during childhood can have lasting consequences for children's health, development and well-being. Climate change further exacerbates these risks by increasing the frequency and intensity of shocks such as droughts, floods and extreme weather events that disrupt food systems, livelihoods and access to nutritious food, leaving children especially vulnerable to food and nutrition insecurity.

Originally developed by World Vision in 2025, the Hungry Futures Index 2.0 (HFI 2.0) builds on the original work to assess the extent to which governments integrate considerations of hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition, particularly among children, into national climate policy instruments submitted to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC). The analysis draws from Nationally Determined Contribution (NDCs) documents and National Adaptation plans (NAPs) (where available).

HFI 2.0. finds that while hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition are widely acknowledged within national climate policies, explicit prioritisation, targeted commitments and corresponding action remain limited. The findings also reveal a significant child-specific gap: although food and nutrition security are commonly addressed at the population level, the distinct vulnerabilities, nutritional needs and climate-related risks faced by children receive far less attention in national climate policy.

This child-specific policy gap highlights the urgent need for climate responses that explicitly address children's hunger, nutritional needs and vulnerabilities. These findings reinforce World Vision's ENOUGH Campaign call for child-responsive climate action and targeted investments to address hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition.

[1] Throughout this policy brief, we use the word "hunger" to refer to "hunger, food insecurity, and malnutrition".

Key findings



Hunger is visible across countries, but rarely prioritised: 73% of countries[2] recognise hunger as a sub-issue, while just 17% identify it as a key issue. Hunger is therefore widely acknowledged, but explicit prioritisation remains limited.



Climate–hunger connections are strongest where vulnerabilities intersect: The relationship between climate change and hunger is most evident where climate risks intersect with poverty, inequality, social exclusion and fragile food systems. These overlapping vulnerabilities can compound existing food and nutrition insecurities, reinforcing the importance of integrated climate action that addresses the underlying drivers of vulnerability.



Food security and nutrition are important indicators of climate policy attention to hunger: The extent governments prioritise food security and nutrition matters when assessing climate policy. Food security and nutrition can capture attention to hunger and malnutrition that is not expressed using these specific terms. However, their inclusion should not automatically be interpreted as evidence of substantive prioritisation, investment or action.



Children remain largely absent from climate responses to hunger: Comparing policy attention to child hunger and malnutrition with broader hunger and malnutrition commitments highlights a significant child-specific policy gap. While many countries recognise food and nutrition security in their national climate policies, fewer explicitly address the distinct nutritional needs and vulnerabilities of children. Attention to hunger at the population level does not necessarily translate into targeted measures to protect children from climate-related food insecurity and malnutrition.



Child malnutrition receives limited explicit attention: Specific forms of child malnutrition are generally embedded within broader climate, food security, agricultural and health priorities rather than recognised as distinct policy concerns requiring targeted action.



Recognition does not consistently translate into action: A substantial recognition-to-action gap remains. Countries are more likely to acknowledge hunger, malnutrition and food security than to identify specific, funded measures to address them. Child-specific action is particularly limited. Moving beyond recognition requires clear targets, responsibilities, financing and implementation mechanisms that connect climate action with children's nutritional needs.



Children's and young people's participation is rarely resourced: 67% of countries include some reference to child and/or youth participation, but only 8% provide dedicated budgetary commitments This highlights a significant gap between acknowledging children and young people as stakeholders and equipping them with the resources and mechanisms needed to influence decision-making. National climate policies are missing opportunities to engage children and young people as active contributors to climate-resilient food systems, food security solutions and adaptation efforts.

[2] A systematic desktop analysis was undertaken of the NDCs and NAPs submitted to the UNFCCC by 83 countries and one regional bloc (84 entities in total). These documents formed the basis of the assessment, generating a dataset of 180 climate policy documents: 84 original NDCs, 58 updated NDCs and 38 NAPs. Further details are provided in the Methodology.

From recognition to action

Food security provides an important entry point for strengthening climate responses to hunger and malnutrition. This is increasingly reflected in international climate policy, including through the UNFCCC's Sharm el-Sheikh joint work on implementation of climate action on agriculture and food security, which promotes integrated approaches to agriculture, food systems and food security and encourages their incorporation into national policies, plans and strategies. The Belém Declaration further underscores the importance of addressing hunger, poverty and the needs of vulnerable populations as part of effective climate action.

NDCs and NAPs already contain many of the policy measures needed to strengthen food and nutrition security and build more climate-resilient food systems.

The challenge is no longer whether these issues are recognised, but whether they are prioritised, financed and implemented. The opportunity now is to move beyond broad acknowledgement towards explicit, adequately resourced action on hunger and malnutrition, including measures that respond to the distinct needs and vulnerabilities of children.

The Hungry Futures Index 2.0 reveals how uncommon it remains for countries to comprehensively integrate hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition as well as child-responsive approaches into their national climate policies. While many countries recognise individual elements of these issues, relatively few translate this recognition into child-specific priorities, meaningful participation and funded action.

Chad provides an illustrative example of how hunger and malnutrition can be linked to child-responsive climate policy. Its climate plans recognise children's heightened vulnerability to climate impacts and the importance of their participation in climate-related decision-making. While these commitments demonstrate policy intent, they should not be interpreted as evidence of implementation or measurable outcomes. Chad also faces significant resource and institutional capacity constraints, with many planned actions dependent on international climate finance. The example highlights a central finding of the HFI 2.0: translating policy commitments into meaningful action requires not only recognition and ambition, but also adequate financing, institutional capacity and effective implementation mechanisms.



Building on the original HFI

The updated HFI 2.0 builds on the original index to provide a more nuanced assessment of how hunger and malnutrition are reflected in national climate policy. It examines the progression from recognition to prioritisation and action, while incorporating food security and child-specific hunger and nutrition concerns.

The updated results should not be interpreted as a direct measure of change from the original HFI (2025). The revised methodology assesses different dimensions of policy attention, meaning that differences between the original and updated findings do not necessarily reflect changes in national policy.

Putting children at the centre of climate action

Overall, the findings highlight a significant opportunity for countries to strengthen the integration of hunger, malnutrition and child-specific considerations within climate policies submitted under the UNFCCC, including NDCs and NAPs. While food security is increasingly recognised as a climate issue, recognition alone is insufficient. Children remain largely absent from climate responses to hunger, while commitments rarely translate into funded and implementable action.

As countries continue to update and implement their NDCs and NAPs, there is an opportunity to embed more explicit, child-responsive and adequately resourced approaches to addressing hunger and malnutrition. This will require clear implementation pathways, meaningful participation of children and young people, adequate and accessible financing, and measures that address children's distinct vulnerabilities and nutritional needs while strengthening the resilience of food systems and communities to climate-related shocks. Children and young people should be recognised not only as those most affected by climate-related food insecurity, but also as active agents of change whose participation, innovation and leadership can contribute to more effective climate solutions.

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